

IDEAS AT Work

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Seen 'bout everything with retrieval program

If you're over age 5 and someone told you that elephants fly, you'd probably be skeptical. Similarly, if you've been around computers for a while and a new product claimed to retrieve data from a reformatted hard disk, you'd probably be equally skeptical.

Well, believe it or not, a set of programs for the IBM PC and compatible computers called **Mace + Utilities**, published by Paul Mace of Ashland, Ore., for \$69.95, offers wonders akin to flying elephants. The cover of the program manual summarizes four claims of this software:

✓ **UnFORMAT** will restore all your subdirectories and files automatically on any hard disk.

✓ **UnDELETE** gets erased files back with four keystrokes and without cross linking.

✓ **REMEDY** automatically moves files to a safe place and locks out the bad spots.

✓ **RECLAIM** automatically extracts files from unreadable disks.

So, there we have it. It sure sounds nice, but what does all that mumbo jumbo mean? Can it really do the impossible — retrieve your data from a reformatted disk — as it appears to state in the description of **UnFORMAT** above?

As I found out in reading the complicated manual, the first — and biggest step — to performing any of these actions is simply understanding what the program's author is talking about.

In this week's column, I'll fill you in on what he means about the **UnFORMAT** part of the program, and describe how the elephant appears to fly. Then, next week, I'll evaluate some of the other more useful parts of the program. This subject will be particularly interesting to people who use IBM PCs or compatible personal computers in business offices, because losing data due to inadvertent reformatting of the wrong disk is a common occurrence. It usually happens when people are formatting floppy



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your subdirectory names and all other files not in subdirectories (more about this in a minute), and installs the operating system. *The contents of all subdirectory files are not removed.*

The trick, therefore, of the **UnFORMAT** part of **Mace + Utilities**, is to reconstruct the root directory by analyzing the remaining files that are on the disk. This enables you to access your subdirectory files.

If you've followed me so far, congratulations! I've just paraphrased the key parts of the manual, which originally took me about an hour to com-

prehend. Don't give up yet — the best is yet to come. Two examples will help clarify **UnFORMAT**.

First, let's say that when you originally installed your application programs on your PC's hard disk, each program was put in a separate directory, sometimes called subdirectories, and only the names of the subdirectories appear in your main directory. This is a convenient way to keep together all your files for each program.

In this case, if everything in your root directory was wiped away during a reformat, the **UnFORMAT** program could retrieve all the files in your subdirectories, and all you'd have to do is put the names of the subdirectories back in the root directory. This would be a major accomplishment.

On the other hand, let's say that when you originally installed your application programs, you did not bother to set up subdirectories for each program. Many people don't, putting everything in the root directory instead. I did this myself when I first got my computer. In this case, if a reformat is done when everything is in the root directory, the **UnFORMAT** program is of no use.

Since **UnFORMAT** can only retrieve files in subdirectories, any batch files normally left in the root directory would also be lost.

One of the other commands in

When people are learning floppy disks for the first time. They use a command called "Format" that gets the disks ready for use. But it's easy to get confused and reformat the computer's internal hard disk — which contains all your valuable data — instead of the blank floppy one.

Conventional wisdom says that when you reformat the wrong disk, you wipe it clean. Not so, says the author of Mace + Utilities. That might be true with other computers, but not with the IBM PC and compatible computers that use the PC-DOS/MS-DOS operating system. These computers merely check the disk for bad sectors, clear the root (main) directory portion of the disk, which contains

the Mace + Utilities goes further than UnFORMAT. It can retrieve everything in the root directory, too — provided you install it *ahead of time*, as a precautionary measure. In the hands of a knowledgeable operator, the program also has features that provide performance improvements that far outweigh the program's modest cost. More on this in my next column.

In conclusion, if the UnFORMAT part of Mace + Utilities is attempted only after an inadvertent reformatting of a disk, the elephant flaps its ears but doesn't quite fly. Nonetheless, if you've lost a valuable file that is in a subdirectory, this part of the program could still be a lifesaver.

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